

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01 SSO-00 DRC-01

AID-20 SWF-02 /132 W

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R 061415Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1295

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y

FOLNG SENT NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE INFO BOMBAY, MADRAS FM CALCUTTA
DTD MAY 3RD:

QUOTE: CALCUTTA 0884

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, ETRN, IN

SUBJ: RAILWAY STRIKE

REF: NEW DELHI 5898

1. THE RAILWAY STRIKE IS ON IN EASTERN INDIA. ARREST OF
FERNANDES HAS RESULTED IN STRIKE BEING OBSERVED FROM LAST NIGHT.
SOCIALIST PARTY SOURCE (BIMAL BANERJEE, HMS SECRETARY, WEST
BENGAL) TELLS US THEY EXPECT STRIKE TO FIZZLE OUT BY MAY 10
AND THAT MRS. GANDHI HAS BEEN CORRECTLY BRIEFED BY HER
INTELLIGENCE AS TO HOW DISORGANIZED THE STIKING UNIONS ARE
AND HOW DIFFICULT IT WILL BE TO SUSTAIN A STRIKE FOR VERY
LONG. THEY SEE THE INDIAN AIRLINES-MODEL BEING APPLIED TO THE
RAILWAYS AND THINK THAT, ALTHOUGH REILWAYS MUCH MORE
IMPORTANT AND SYSTEM MUCH MORE COMPLEX, THAT STRATEGY MAY
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WELL WORK IF OTHER THINS DON'T GO HAYWIRE IN THE INTERIM

(OTHER THINGS MEANING FOOD SUPPLY, INDUSTRIAL CHAOS AND/OR OPPOSITION PARTIES GETTING THICKLY INVOLVED). INTERMITTENT, LOCALIZED, MANAGEABLE VIOLENCE EXPECTED. THE ARREST OF FERNANDES HAS: (A) MADE HIM A HERO AND (B) INSURED THAT THERE WILL BE STRIKE (BANERJEE WAS NOT CONFIDENT IT WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE GOTTEN OFF THE GROUND AS SCHEDULED ON MAY 8).

2. GOWB OFFICIALS HAVE ISSUED SOME BRAVE STATEMENTS ABOUT HOW READY THEY ARE TO MEET ANY SITUATION, CITING THE FACT THAT THE ARMY HAS BEEN ALERTED AND THE TERRITORIAL ARMY WILL OPERATE, IF NECESSARY, THE TRAINS. CHIEF MINISTER RAY HAS APPEALED ONCE AGAIN TO THE WORKERS NOT TO STRIKE IN LIGHT OF THE INEVITABLE DIFFICULTIES THE STRIKE WILL CAUSE FOR "THE POORER SECTIONS" OF SOCIETY, WHO LIVE A "WAGON TO MOUTH" EXISTENCE IN TERMS OF ESSENTIAL FOODGRAINS.

3. FOODGRAIN AVAILABILITY IS THE MOST IMMEDIATE CONCERN HERE. WE HEAR VARYING ESTIMATES (FROM TWO TO FIFTEEN) OF HOW MANY DAYS-SUPPLIES ARE ALREADY IN CALCUTTA. OUR GUESS, GIVEN PAST EXPERIENCE, AND THE GO-SLOW BY THE CALCUTTA FCI OVER THE PAST TWO MONTHS, IS THAT THE QUANTITY WOULD NOT BE MORE THAN ONE WEEK'S SUPPLY--IT MAY BE LESS.

4. GENERAL MANAGERS OF BOTH EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN RAILWAYS HAVE BEEN QUITE HAWKISH THE PAST COUPLE OF WEEKS IN PRIVATE AND SEMI-PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS. THEY WANT TO TAKE ON THE UNIONS, RESTORE DISCIPLINE, ETC. ON THE AIR MARSHALL LAL MODEL.

5. SITUATION HERE IS COMPLICATED BY THE UNITED LEFT FRONT PROTEST BOX DAY TODAY, WHICH, IF IT GOES ACCORDING TO SCHEDULE, WILL SEE THE ARREST (FOR PLANNED VIOLATION OF PROHIBITORY ACTS) THIS AFTERNOON OF JYOTI BASU AND OTHER CPI(M) LEADERS AS WELL AS THE CPI ASSEMBLY LEADER BISWANATH MUKHERJEE. EVEN WITHOUT THE RAILWAY STRIKE THIS SITUATION WAS FRAUGHT WITH POSSIBILITIES, PARTICULARLY IF VIOLENCE OCCURS. THERE CONCEIVABLY COULD BE A LINKUP, GIVEN CPI(M) AND SOCIALIST POLITICAL UNDERSTANDING. OF THOSE ARRESTED YESTERDAY, ALL WERE SOCIALIST EXCEPT ONE CPI(M)--BOROOAH--AND ONE JAN SANGH MEMBER.

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6. OTHER COMPLICATING FACTOR IS THE LAW-AND-ORDER SITUATION IN BIHAR WHERE THE SOCIALIST PARTY (IN ITS VARIOUS FACTIONS) IS STRONG AND WHERE, ACCORDING TO BANERJEE, THERE HAD ALREADY BEEN SOME PRELIMINARY TALKS AIMED AT GETTING STUDENT SUPPORT FOR THE RAILWAY WORKERS. JAYA PRAKASH NARAYAN WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN 1949 IN GETTING THE THEN PROPOSED NATIONAL RAILWAY STRIKE CALLED OFF BECAUSE OF FEARS

OF VIOLENCE AND COMMUNIST INFLUENCE. HE MAY TRY TO ASSERT
HIMSELF AGAIN, BUT THIS TIME MIGHT WELL SIDE WITH THE
WORKERS.

7. PEOPLE HERE ARE SPECULATING ABOUT ROLE OF CPI AND DANGE.
IT MAY BE TIME FOR CPI TO DECIDE WHERE IT STANDS IN REGARD
TO CONGRESS AND MRS. GANDHI. IT LOOKS AS THOUGH IT IS IN A
REAL CRUNCH IN TERMS OF ITS "UNITY AND STRUGGLE" STRATEGY.
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